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## THE MONOLITHS OF SAN JUAN TEOTIHUACAN, MEXICO.

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During the spring of 1884, I paid a short visit to the ruined city of San Juan Teotihuacan, situated about twenty-five miles north-east of the city of Mexico. I had not intended to publish any part of my hastily-taken notes, but my attention having recently been called to the great monoliths of this locality by a paper published in the *American Antiquarian*,<sup>1</sup> I observed that the accounts given by the various authors who have touched upon the subject are of a nature to lead to very embarrassing errors. This will clearly appear from the facts to which I shall call attention.

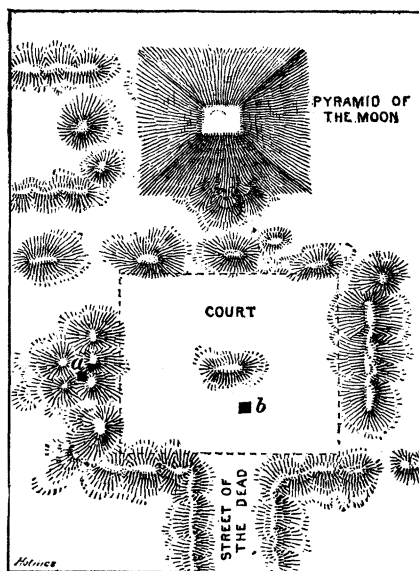


FIG. 9.—Sketch-map.

<sup>1</sup> Amos W. Butler, *The Sacrificial Stone of San Juan Teotihuacan*, *American Antiquarian*, May, 1885, p. 149.

I desire to refer only to the two principal monoliths that lie exposed to view: one in the great court near the base of the pyramid of the Moon, and the other among the low mounds that lie along the western border of the court. The accompanying sketch-map, fig. 9, will serve to locate them with a degree of accuracy sufficient for my purpose. The one located at *a* has been described and illustrated by a number of authors, and is an object familiar to travellers. The other has probably never been illustrated, although mention is made of it by several writers who go no farther than to state that a large stone exhibiting slight traces of sculpture is to be seen at this spot (*b* on my map).



FIG. 10.—*Battered monolith in the great court near the entrance to the "street of the dead" (from a sketch).*

*The prostrate monolith.*—As one encounters this object by the side of a modern lane, it looks like a great block or mass of dark rock without artificial features, but on close examination it proves to be the remnant of a large idol lying upon its side. The head extends into the roadway and the lower extremity is built into a rude stone fence. In fig. 10 it is shown in an upright position. It probably lies where it was left by the followers of Zumarraga, and bears unmistakable evidence of the heavy hand laid by European fanatics

upon the graven gods of the Mexicans.<sup>2</sup> The whole surface has been battered with hammers or scaled off by fire, so that all the salient features are destroyed, giving to the whole figure a rudely oval outline as viewed from the side or front. It is a little over six feet in height, about five feet in width, and four in depth; my measurements, having been hastily made with a tape-line, are but approximate. The face is thirty-six inches wide, and from this measurement an idea of the other dimensions may be gained. The eyes, nose, and mouth are still distinguishable, as are also parts of the costume. There is a deep pit in the breast, a feature usual in Mexican sculpture and probably intended for the insertion of some brilliant stone.

The rock is a dark gray porphyritic trachyte or andesite, in which are enclosed a number of large brecciated fragments of light-colored rock. This is the object of which Brantz Mayer<sup>3</sup> says, referring to his map, that "at B, on the plan, there is a large globular mass of granite measuring nineteen feet eight inches in circumference, upon which there is some rude carving which has been found to bear some resemblance to the Aztec figure of the sun." I cannot think that this idol ever rested upon either of the great pyramids, as it could not have rolled to this spot, and there would be no reason for its removal after the destruction of the city. It is not impossible, however, that it occupied the summit of the small mound near the base of which it lies.

*The Almaraz monolith.*—The other monolith is in an excellent state of preservation, not having suffered as much from the tooth of time or the hand of the iconoclast as from the pen and the pencil of the modern tourist-explorer. It is located at *a*, fig. 9, in the position assigned to it by Almaraz and other authors. It stands in a narrow depression on the west side of a low mound and in front of a cave-like opening in the mound-mass, as indicated in fig. 11, which is a careful reproduction of a photograph made by my travelling companion, Mr. William H. Jackson. I give it in this half-buried state, in order that all doubt as to the present condition of the

<sup>2</sup> I adopt here the generally accepted view, that this city was conquered and destroyed by the Spaniards, although, as Mr. Bandelier has suggested, there may be grounds for doubt on this point.

<sup>3</sup> Brantz Mayer, *Mexico: Aztec, Spanish, and Republican*, Hartford, 1853, Vol. II. pp. 281-2.

figure may be cleared away, and to show that it is really the monolith referred to in the *Antiquarian*, as well as by the various authors from whom I shall quote. In reviewing such of the literature of this figure as has fallen in my way, I find that most of the illustrations published are copied from a lithograph given by Almaraz,<sup>4</sup> of

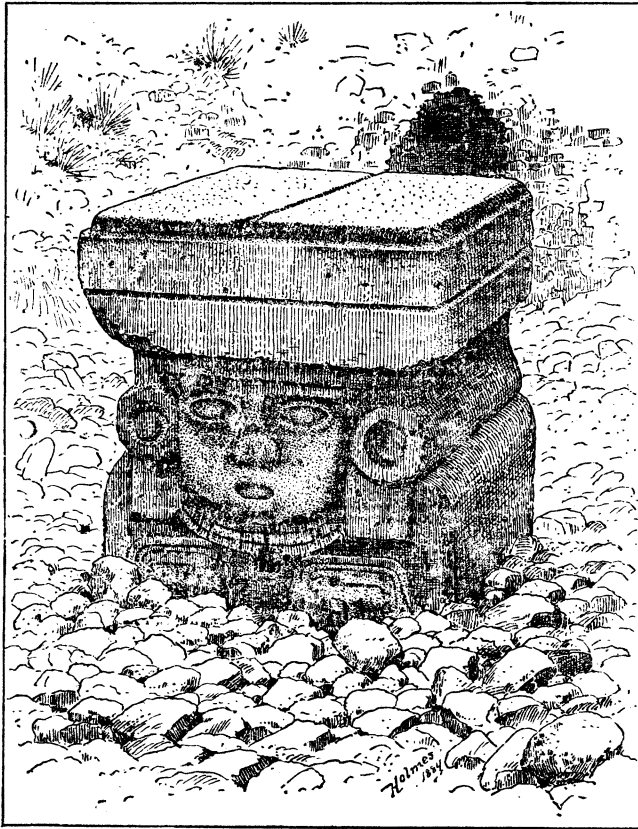


FIG. 11.—The monolith as seen in 1884 (from a photograph).

which a reduced copy is presented in fig. 12. The paper by Almaraz was prepared in 1864, and the lithograph, taken from a photograph by Antonio Espanosa, shows the figure as it appeared at

<sup>4</sup>Ramon Almaraz, *Apuntes sobre las pirámides de San Juan Teotihuacan*, p. 365, in the *Memoria de los Trabajos Ejecutados por la Comisión Científica de Pachuca*, 1864.

that time. The statue is described by this author in the following language:

"Among the objects of this class, the most notable is a monolith found among the débris of a mound and of which I give an illustration. Being partially buried in the earth when first shown me, and with its principal face to the ground, it was first necessary to place



FIG. 12.—*The Almaraz monolith as it appeared in 1864.*

it on its feet. It is a parallelopiped 10 feet 5.59 inches in height and 5 feet 4.96 inches along one of the sides of the square base; hence its volume is 306.16 cubic feet; and its density being 1.88, its weight is found to be 18 tons. The principal face is represented in the drawing; the other sides have some resemblance to a Ninevite

column." I shall have occasion to refer to this description further on, and will here present a few additional extracts.

Señor Mendoza, director of the Mexican National Museum, publishes a sketch made from the lithograph of Almaraz, and speaks of the statue as follows: "It represents a god of the people who constructed the pyramids in the city of the gods, the famous Teotihuacan—famous not only among the people of our day but also among the peoples who many centuries ago inhabited these high regions. This god is made of a trachyte of doubtful variety; its form is that of a parallelopiped, its height is 125.5 inches, and it measures 64.9 inches at the base. We have ascertained these dimensions and have subsequently found them verified in the Memoir of the Scientific Commission of Pachuca. . . . At present (1878) this god stands upright at the base of one of the many mounds that still remain in that vast city."<sup>5</sup>

In 1880, Désiré Charnay visited this spot, photographed the statue, and examined the cave before which it stands. He states that formerly it lay prone upon the ground, and that Maximilian had it set upon its feet. He says, also, that "the block of trachyte is nearly ten and a half feet in height and nearly sixty-four inches square at the base; its estimated weight is thirty-six thousand pounds."<sup>6</sup> It will be seen, from the above quotations, that the French author does not mention the Mexican Scientific Commission, by which the figure was set up and from which he derives his measurements; nor does the Commission in any part of its work refer to Maximilian, who was then Emperor of Mexico. Another version of this figure is given in a recent work.<sup>7</sup> The illustration presented appears to have been made before the débris had accumulated quite to its present height, as the hands and a part of the border of the mantle are shown, but, as in that of the *Antiquarian*, the artist seems to have regarded the part exposed as the complete object. Bancroft has reproduced the Almaraz figure in a small cut,<sup>8</sup> and along with it gives a cut reproduced from Mayer (Op. cit., II. p. 282) and described by that author as the "fainting stone." To

<sup>5</sup> G. Mendoza, *Anales del Museo Nacional de Mexico*, Mexico, 1878, Vol. I. p. 225. Plate opposite p. 216.

<sup>6</sup> Désiré Charnay, *North American Review*, September, 1880, p. 195.

<sup>7</sup> *Mexico á través de los Siglos*, Mexico, 1884, p. 366.

<sup>8</sup> H. H. Bancroft, *Native Races*, New York, 1885, Vol. IV. pp. 540-41.

this stone I wish now to call attention, leaving a fuller description of the image to be given later.

*The fainting stone.*—At as early a date as 1836, when Latrobe wrote, this stone was regarded as possessing marvellous powers. In 1846, Thompson describes it as being near the pyramids “in a secluded spot shut closely in by two small hillocks. . . . I think it is about ten feet long, five or six feet broad, and

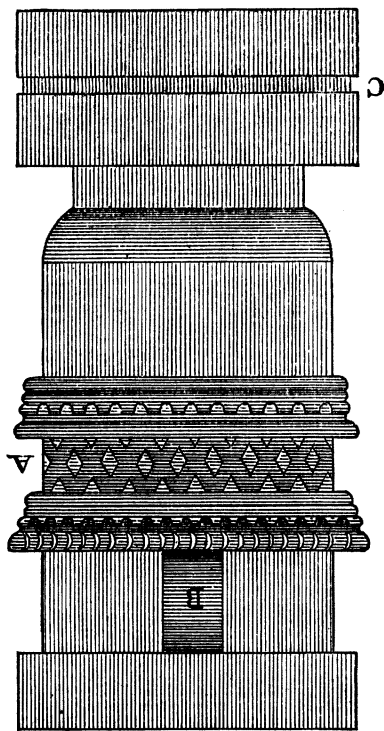


FIG. 13.—The “fainting stone,” from Mayer (*inverted*).

as many feet in height. It is very handsomely hewn, with a well-cut cornice, but has no human or other figures in relief, which are so well cut on the sacrificial stones of Mexico. The whole weight of the huge mass of porphyritic stone cannot be less than twenty-five tons.”<sup>9</sup> Mayer (*Op. cit.*, II. p. 282) says that “in the

<sup>9</sup> Waddy Thompson, *Recollections of Mexico*, New York, 1846, p. 140.



semicircular enclosure among the tumuli at *C* (apparently the same as my *a*) is placed the sculptured granite (?) stone, represented in the annexed cut (fig. 13). It lies due east and west. The dark shadow *B* represents a sink or hollow three inches deep at the sides, and six at the top and bottom. This is known as the 'fainting stone,' as it is alleged that all who recline on its surface are sure to experience lassitude, or lose animation for a while." In another publication, quoted by Bancroft, Mayer states that "it is ten feet and a half long, and five feet wide, lies exactly east and west, and is found in the center of a small group of mounds. The cut shows the sculpture on the face turned toward the south, that on the top and north being very indistinct."<sup>10</sup> Other citations could be made, but these are sufficient for my purpose.

I wish now to call attention to this figure in connection with the idol last described. In reading the various accounts of the two objects, I observed that all refer to the same spot, and that the surroundings are alike; also, that observers who visited the locality previously to the time of Maximilian describe the "fainting stone," while those visiting it subsequently describe the great idol, no single visitor, so far as my reading goes, having mentioned both. From these rather extraordinary facts I was led to surmise that possibly all the accounts referred to one and the same stone, the earlier observers having seen the back and part of the sides of the prostrate figure, and the later writers, the whole upright image or such part of it as happened to remain above ground.

I at once proceeded to make comparisons, and found many remarkable analogies along with some points of difference. Constructing a front elevation from the lithograph of Almaraz, I placed it by the side of Mayer's cut of the "fainting stone." I found it necessary to invert Mayer's figure before a comparison could begin. Having done this, the cap stones of the two figures corresponded very closely, as will be seen by reference to the illustrations. At first, I found what appeared to be an insuperable difficulty, in the presence of a base in one figure and the absence of such a member in the other. However, by a study of the dimensions given by the various authors, I discovered that the drawings of the idol were all upwards of ten inches short; and upon obtaining the original account by Almaraz, already

<sup>10</sup> Mayer, *Mexico as it Was and as it Is*, Philadelphia, 1847, p. 222.

quoted, I found that he referred definitely to a square base, although it does not appear in his illustration. This error probably came from obscurity in the photograph and a lack of proper supervision on the part of the author when it came to be engraved. The true form of the monolith is therefore shown for the first time in fig. 14, and the correspondence of the two objects under consideration in general outline is clearly established. There are slight discrepancies in the dimensions given, but nothing that might not result from careless measuring or average guessing.

And now, for convenience of comparison, let us assume that all the descriptions refer to the same monument, and let us attempt to discover just how Mayer must have seen the figure. As it stands to-day, the face is to the west, and hence in his time it lay upon its face with the top or head in that direction, since in raising it Almaraz could hardly have turned it around. This position would place the left side to the south and the right toward the north. Mayer must, therefore, have made his sketch from the left side: the side now in the best state of preservation. He could not, however, have seen all of either side, as the stone was partly buried, and in all probability some license was taken in constructing the profile. The drawing is highly mechanical (a marked characteristic of his map, also), and the lines are given with a precision that makes no allowance for rounded edges or broken corners; and, since he regarded it as an altar, the outlines given were probably influenced by this view. It is certain that it was placed with that end up which gave it most decidedly the appearance of an oriental altar. I think, however, that the archæologist who regarded only American sculpture would place it as I place it in fig. 14. It should be noticed that in the idol the carving on all sides save the front is purely geometric and arranged in horizontal bands, as in the "fainting stone," and that Mayer, while he obtained his details from the left side, must have drawn his profile from the back, or what was then the top.

Continuing our comparison, it will be noticed that the number and position of the leading features are identical, and that the proportion and details vary but little. We have the same horizontally grooved cap or turban with the deep undercutting below it, the rounded shoulder differing slightly in detail, the vertical space at the sides, the double row of beaded mouldings with the depressed decorated zone between, and below this the legs and base. It will

be seen that in the lithograph of Almaraz the greater part of the depressed belt between the mouldings is in shadow, and that a line of *nine* triangular figures appears along the lighted lower margin. A much more elaborate design occurs in the sunken belt of the "fainting stone," but the lower part shows *nine* triangular figures. It seems to me highly probable that, were it not for the shadow, we

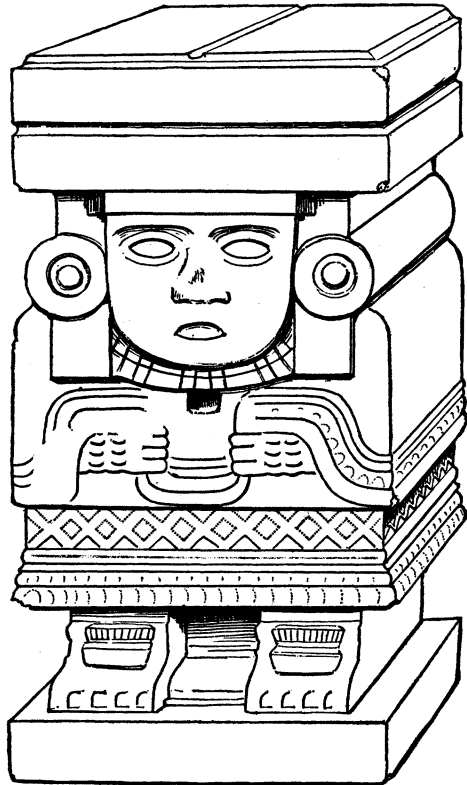


FIG. 14.—*Theoretical completion of the monolith.*

should see the same design in both, as shown by dotted lines in fig. 14. The decorated bands and mouldings represent the garments. The upper moulding is the skirt of the mantle which runs horizontally along the sides, perhaps the back, and passes over the arms and through the hands, forming a festoon in front. The depressed space is the belt, and the heavy moulding below is the

margin of the skirt of the body-garment. The rectangular depression given by Mayer exactly corresponds in size with the depression between the legs of the figure as seen from the front, and probably occurs at the back of the figure as indicated by him. There will also be found a close correspondence in the details of the mouldings, and certainly a remarkable analogy throughout.

When the great monolith is again rescued from the earth, it is probable that the question here raised can be finally settled, and we shall know whether or not the luckless idol has really been made to do duty as an altar, a pillar, a "fainting stone," a sacrificial stone, and a god of the Aztecs, taking in literature three separate uncorrelated guises at one and the same time. As to what the great sculpture should be called, it is useless to speculate. In time it will probably be identified with some god of the aborigines. Although not indicating a very high stage of art, it is simple and imposing, and compares well with the better-known monoliths of the National Museum. Its position at the time of the Conquest was certainly not far distant from the spot on which it now stands.

WILLIAM H. HOLMES.